

**The Free Methodist Church in Canada
The Seventh Canadian General Conference
PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE**

[The following précis of *Robert's Rules of Order* is for information and reference purposes.]

The comments which follow are intended to provide information and clarification to delegates to the General Conference about the practices which govern the manner in which business is conducted. These comments assume the adoption of the Standing Rules of Order proposed for the 2008 General Conference as well as the adoption of *Robert's Rules of Order* as the standard of parliamentary procedure.

PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

The purpose of *Robert's Rules of Order*, as stated in the original preface (1876), is "to assist an assembly to accomplish the work for which it was designed, in the best possible manner."

It is important that *order, decency and regularity* be preserved if the General Conference is to carry out its work as a parliamentary body. "To do this," Roberts declared, "it is necessary to restrain the individual somewhat, as the right on an individual in any community, to do what he or she pleases, is incompatible with the interests of the whole."

PARLIAMENTARY PRINCIPLES should be observed by the delegates in the plenary sessions (assembly of all delegates):

1. **Consider one thing at a time.** Only one matter (report, motion or vote) may be "on the floor" at any time. This is a fundamental principle in parliamentary procedure.
2. **Stick to the issue at hand.** The first principle evokes a second. Attention must be focused on the "one thing" before the body. Any comments, discussion or debate should be relevant to "the issue at hand."
3. **Speak to the motion.** Delegates participating in debate on a motion should indicate at the outset whether they are speaking in favor of or against the proposed action. They ought not to address other matters in their speech, except that which is pertinent to the issue at hand.
4. **Debate motions, not members.** Delegates are to address the chair, not one another. Their comments should be addressed to "the issue at hand," not other members.
5. **Observe Christian courtesy.** Being respectful, considerate and patient are Christian virtues. They also are basic tenets in parliamentary proceedings. They ought to be practiced at all times.

CERTAIN RIGHTS are protected by *Robert's Rules of Order*:

1. The **individual** delegate has the right to participate in plenary proceedings.
2. The **minority** has the right to be heard on all debatable motions.
3. The **majority** has the right to determine the outcome of most votes

To facilitate the work of the General Conference, the following rules are proposed:

1. **Times of speeches:** Speeches are to be limited to three minutes. If a delegate continues beyond three minutes, the chair may call time. At this signal, the delegate should cease speaking and be seated.
2. **Balance of speakers:** Speakers are heard alternately for and against the motion, up to a limit of three for each side. If three delegates in order speak on one side of a motion, the chair will determine if anyone wishes to speak on the opposing side. If not, the chair may terminate the debate and call for the vote.

GUIDELINES

The making of a "motion" is the primary means by which a matter is brought before the body.

The making of a motion is a special privilege. Once a motion is made and seconded, it becomes the "issue at hand," and the entire body must devote its full attention to it. In a large assembly, every minute is valuable. The individual delegate, therefore, must weigh carefully his/her claim for attention, not only in offering a Main Motion for consideration, but in moving an amendment, entering the debate on a motion, or rising to a point of (personal) privilege.

This comment is not meant to squelch delegate participation. It is meant to serve as a reminder that the *purpose* of an individual participating (which is the right of all delegates) is to assist the assembly to accomplish its *work*.

Outlined below for reference purposes, are the primary motions:

1. MAIN MOTION

When you want to bring to the body a particular proposal for its consideration, the proper motion is:

"I move that . . ." or "I move the adoption (acceptance/approval) of this report."

A main motion requires a second, is debatable and can be amended; it requires a majority vote to pass. The main motions of the General Conference will be introduced primarily by the Study Team reports.

2. SECONDARY MOTIONS

A. When you want to modify a proposed action in some way, the proper form for minor change is . . .

1. "I move to amend the motion by striking out . . ."
2. "I move to amend the motion by inserting . . . between . . . and . . ."
3. "I move to amend the motion by adding . . . after . . ."
4. "I move to amend the motion by striking out . . . and substituting this: (read or state substitute)"
5. "I move to amend by striking out . . . and substituting this : (read or state substitute)"

A motion to amend requires a second and is debatable. It can itself be amended, by a motion to amend the Motion to Amend. This should be used sparingly! These motions require a simple majority to pass.

A more substantive change is sometimes called a "substitute motion." This form of amendment should be used sparingly!

B. Move to refer, commit or recommit

When you want to place the matter on the floor in the hands of a few delegates for later report and recommendation to the conference, the proper motion is:

"I move that this matter be referred to . . . committee (or a committee to be appointed by the chair.)" Specific instructions as to the assignment or desired report may also be included.

Usually this motion is used when it becomes apparent that major changes are needed in the Main Motion. In most instances, the matter may be referred back or recommitted to the originating committee for further work.

The Motion to Refer requires a second, may be debated and amended. It requires a majority vote to pass.

C. Move to table or postpone

When you want to propose the matter be laid aside for consideration at a later time, you may move either to table or to postpone. The proper form of motion is:

"I move that this matter be laid on the table . . ." or
"I move that this matter be postponed until . . ."

The Motion to Table (or Take from the Table) requires a second but is *not* debatable and can *not* be amended. It requires a simple majority vote to pass. Later, the matter may be brought to the floor using the following motion:

"I move to take from the table (restate the motion)."

The Motion to Postpone, while accomplishing much the same purpose, works a little differently. It too requires a second but is debatable and amendable. It requires a majority vote to pass.

D. Move to close debate

When you wish to stop debate on the matter "on the floor," the proper motion *following recognition by the chair*, is:

"I move the previous question."

This motion requires a second but is *not* debatable and can *not* be amended. It requires a two thirds vote to pass. If this motion passes, the motion is immediately put to a vote, *without further debate*. If this motion fails, the debate on the floor is to be continued as if no interruption has occurred.

Note: While a delegate may call out "Question," this does not constitute a motion (and may be disruptive). Neither the chair nor the body need to take any note of it. If you wish to terminate the debate, the proper procedure is to raise your hand and, when called on by the chair, to move the "previous question."

PRIVILEGE AND INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

These motions should be used sparingly, if at all, by individual delegates.

A. Move to adjourn or recess

If you wish to have the meeting dismissed or to provide for an intermission, the proper form of motion is:

"I move that we adjourn/recess (while . . . or until . . .)"

B. Request a point of (personal) privilege

If you wish to get the attention of the chair at once, to ask a question extraneous to the matter at hand or attend to some other matter that cannot wait, the proper form of motion is:

"I rise to a question of privilege . . . (state petition)."

DEFINING KEY ROLES

It is important that the General Conference understand the role of the Chair. His/her primary duties are as follows:

1. To open the meeting at the appointed time by taking the chair and calling the meeting to order.
2. To announce in proper sequence the business that comes before the conference.
3. To recognize delegates who are entitled to the floor.
4. To state and put to vote all questions that come before the conference and to announce the result of each vote.
5. To enforce the rules relating to debate and to order within the conference.
6. To expedite business in every way consistent with the rights of the delegates.
7. To decide all question of order.
8. To respond to inquiries of delegates relating to parliamentary procedure.
9. To declare the meeting adjourned when the assembly so votes or at the time prescribed in the agenda.

The role of the Parliamentarian also needs to be clearly understood.

1. The task of the parliamentarian is limited to giving advice to the Chair. It is the duty of the parliamentarian to call to the attention of the Chair any errors in the proceedings that may affect the rights of any delegate or may otherwise do harm.
2. The parliamentarian should be called upon to speak publicly on only the most involved matter. This practice should be avoided if at all possible.
3. Once the parliamentarian has expressed an opinion on a point, whether privately to the Chair or publicly to the body, the Chair has the duty to make the final ruling and in doing so has the right to follow the advice of the parliamentarian or to disregard it.